

Other Targets

Although the violence was centered in Wilmington, men throughout the state were threatened with bodily harm both before and after the election. A gradual shift in both the racial and political makeup of the state was reflected in the political rhetoric of the white supremacy campaign. Whereas many Wilmingtonians were either killed or banished as a result of the election campaign or the violence on November tenth, a few white men such as Wilmington Populist Benjamin Keith, Senator Marion Butler, and Governor Daniel Russell were assured that they had escaped with their lives. All experienced physical threats, with Keith living in constant fear in Wilmington, Russell barricaded in the Governor's Mansion, and Butler moving between North Carolina and Washington, D. C.

Keith maintained throughout the rest of his life that men such as Furnifold Simmons worked to ruin him financially and politically, even threatening his family well into the twentieth century. Keith managed to keep his prospects open and was appointed collector of customs for the port of Wilmington in 1903 by President Theodore Roosevelt and held on to the position for over 12 years before retiring to his Pender County farm. In the period prior to the riot and in the ensuing decades, Keith continuously was on the defensive in business and politics in order to forestall efforts by Democrats to deprive him of either income or political station.⁶⁸

⁶⁸ Keith, *Memories*; Connor, *History of North Carolina: North Carolina Biography* V, 117. Although Keith was respected by some businessmen of Wilmington after the 1898 coup, he had just as many enemies. In 1921, in an attempt to secure reappointment as the collector of customs for the port, Keith penned a long letter to President Warren G. Harding in which he detailed his personal and political trials: "[A]fter destroying my business, they for years tried to ostracize me and my family." B. F.

After the election and the frenzy surrounding the riot, Governor Russell went to Asheville with his wife on November fourteenth for her health. Russell wrote Butler on the twelfth that "Mrs. Russell has been through such a terrible ordeal that I am getting uneasy about her." He was afraid that she was on the verge of a breakdown, and, as a result, he was taking her on the trip "for a day or so." One of the stresses factors weighing upon the Russells was the realization that his "friends in Wilmington" had tried to assassinate him. Their trip was planned to only last two days. While they were there, Russell met with leading Republicans to discuss the party's defeat.⁶⁹ Upon his return to Raleigh, Russell found himself isolated from the Republican Party and set to face an aggressive Democratic legislature in 1899. Russell feared that if he resigned or if were impeached, he would not be able to return to Wilmington because there "the devils are breaking up our business and it looks like we will be driven from our home." Uncertain about his future, Russell even asked his friend Benjamin Duke if he could get a job with his tobacco firm in New York. Russell confided in Duke that "being a Republican and living in the South are getting to be too rank to be borne."⁷⁰

When the General Assembly convened in 1899, Russell's biennial message was cautious but addressed the issue of race and politics. Russell denied Democratic Party accusations of "negro

Keith to President Harding, July 5, 1921, photocopy of original owned by Thomas J. Keith.

⁶⁹ Discussion of the attempted assassination of Russell can be found in Chapter 4. *Raleigh Morning Post*, November 15, 1898; Governor Russell to Marion Butler, November 12, 1898, Marion Butler Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina Library, Chapel Hill.

⁷⁰ Daniel Russell to Benjamin Duke, November 19, December 2, 1898, B. N. Duke Papers as cited in Crow, *Maverick Republican*, 136.